

Ditton Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111183
Local Authority	Halton
Inspection number	288884
Inspection date	1 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Allan Torr HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	5-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	335
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr T Spruce
Headteacher	Mr P Berresford
Date of previous school inspection	10 June 2002
School address	Liverpool Road Widnes Cheshire WA8 7HD
Telephone number	0151 4245861
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- teaching and learning in mathematics
- standards and the progress that pupils make in mathematics
- the effectiveness of subject leaders
- the quality of assessment, marking and targets to accelerate pupils' progress.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail. The inspector agreed with the school's own judgements about teaching and learning; care, guidance and support; the effectiveness of the Foundation Stage; and leadership and management.

Description of the school

Ditton is a larger than average primary school located near the centre of Widnes. It serves an area of relatively high disadvantage. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The proportion of pupils with learning disabilities and/or difficulties is above average, as is the number with a statement of special educational need. The number of pupils from minority ethnic groups is small. There has been some disruption in the quality of teaching because of long-term illness. The school provides parental support through a family learning programme. The school has achieved Healthy School status and a 'Tasty Tuck' Silver Award.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

Ditton Primary School provides a satisfactory standard of education in all areas except in relation to pupils' achievement and standards in mathematics, which are both inadequate. In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all other circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to teaching, learning, standards and achievement in mathematics.

Children enter Key Stage 1 with skills that are broadly typical for their age, after making good progress in the Reception class. Their mathematical skills are better than their communication, language and literacy. By the time they take the national assessments at the end of Year 2, pupils reach expected levels in reading and writing, although fewer than average attain the higher levels. Pupils currently in Key Stage 1 are making satisfactory progress in reading and writing. This is the result of effective changes made to teaching and learning by the headteacher and senior leaders in response to a decline in standards in 2004 and 2005. Between Year 2 and the end of Year 6, pupils make satisfactory progress in English so that approximately three quarters reach the expected Level 4; this proportion is similar to the national average. This is because teaching is satisfactory overall, with strengths in the helpful advice and support for pupils in teachers' marking and the setting of clear targets for improvement in the next piece of work.

There has been a decline in pupils' performance in mathematics since 2005. It was most marked in 2007, when the Year 6 pupils attained well below the unvalidated national average in the national tests. This was the school's worst result for a number of years. Current standards in mathematics are broadly satisfactory although a large proportion of pupils in most year groups are not reaching the levels of which they are capable. A large proportion of pupils are not making fast enough progress because teaching and learning in mathematics are often not good enough and sometimes inadequate. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can do are too low, there is insufficient challenge in lessons and little opportunity for pupils to think, explain their opinions and apply their knowledge. The tasks that pupils complete are often too easy and uninspiring, which hinders their progress.

The curriculum overall is satisfactory and meets the needs of the majority of pupils. Provision for the teaching of foreign languages is a strength of the school. Pupils learn to read and use words and phrases in French and Spanish from a young age. Signs around the school are in two languages and teachers exploit opportunities for pupils to use another language; for example, in answering their names at registration times. The good emphasis on teaching personal and social skills is having a positive effect. Pupils are aware of what they need to do to stay safe, particularly in terms of safety in the home and when using the Internet. Pupils are aware of what they should do to stay healthy and are keen to access fruit, wholemeal bread and water at play and lunchtime. There are some good opportunities for pupils to develop workplace skills such as collaboration, research and an awareness of profit. For example, older Key Stage 2 pupils learn how to work in a team to provide a service that will make a profit on their initial 50 pence investment. The development of skills in information and communication technology (ICT) forms a key part of the curriculum and this aspect has improved since the last inspection. Pupils make a good contribution to the school and local community. The school council meets to discuss issues, although not all pupils are aware of what the council has achieved or been

working on. Pupils are keen to take on jobs around the school, such as playground pals and monitors. Pupils raise funds for local, national and international causes such as disaster relief and the shoebox appeal.

The headteacher provides satisfactory leadership and management. The day-to-day running of the school is smooth and he has a clear view of the strengths and weaknesses in the school's provision. However, leaders at all levels have been slow to react to the dip in standards in mathematics and to tackle inadequate teaching in previous years. The headteacher has made good use of support from the local authority to tackle other weaknesses in the school, such as attendance and the assessment system. As a result, pupils' attendance is now in line with the national average and the system to assess and track pupils' progress through the school is more robust. The school is now able to identify accurately any pupils who are not making the progress that they should. The system is in its early days and has not yet been fully embedded so that its impact at present is limited, but it has highlighted the dip in pupils' achievement in mathematics. It has also strengthened the school's capacity to make further improvements; overall, this is satisfactory. The headteacher has dealt adequately with significant disruption to teaching through staff illness and absence. Although the majority of parents are happy with the education that pupils receive, over a quarter who replied to the questionnaire had significant negative comments about the school, some of which were justified by the evidence from this inspection.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children enter the Reception class with skills that are more typical of children a year younger, apart from in mathematics where they are above average. They make good progress because of good teaching that is based on the skills and knowledge that each child needs to learn. The curriculum is good and meets children's needs. For example, the Foundation Stage leader became aware of the children's lack of cultural awareness. She devised a new topic on festivals and created a resource box to use in lessons. As a result, children's awareness of other cultures improved significantly. Children develop in confidence and self-esteem. They are aware of class routines and behave well. Induction procedures into Reception are good and enable children to gain in confidence and to make a good start to their school lives. The Foundation Stage manager provides good leadership; she monitors, evaluates and reviews provision continuously and strives for excellence.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and accelerate pupils' progress across the curriculum but particularly in mathematics.
- Raise teachers' expectations of what children can achieve in mathematics so that work is better matched to children's needs.
- Plan more exciting tasks to enable pupils to explain, justify and apply their knowledge of mathematics.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Although standards overall are satisfactory, pupils' achievement in mathematics is inadequate. Results at the end of Key Stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics declined in 2004 and 2005. Intervention from senior leaders led to an improvement in literacy, as reflected in the

national assessments in 2006. The most recent results from 2007 indicate that pupils' reading and writing skills are broadly average but too few pupils attain the higher levels. This is because higher attaining pupils are not challenged sufficiently in lessons. Standards in mathematics are below average, particularly at the higher levels, and a large number of pupils do not make the progress that should be expected of them. This is because teaching is sometimes inadequate and expectations of pupils are too low.

In Key Stage 2, standards in English, science and ICT are average. Standards in mathematics are well below average. By the time pupils start Year 6 there is too much ground to make up. Results have declined in the national tests in mathematics in the last three years. Only just over half of pupils attained the expected Level 4 in 2007 and only 5% attained the higher Level 5. This is well below average. Although the school's data from assessments indicates that results in 2008 could be higher, standards are too low overall in Key Stage 2. The progress that pupils make between Key Stages 1 and 2 has fallen each year since 2004 and is inadequate.

The progress and standards of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

The majority of pupils enjoy school and, in a survey, just over half said that lessons were interesting and fun. Due to a good partnership between the school and the local authority, attendance and punctuality have improved, reversing the downward trend of the previous three years. Attendance is now satisfactory. Pupils are physically active at lunchtime and playtimes and make good use of facilities such as the climbing wall. Pupils feel safe because adults in the school help them to understand the possible risks and dangers to their well-being. They show a good awareness of how to stay safe at home, for example by being careful with electrical equipment. Adults deal adequately with bullying incidents and any poor behaviour. Pupils are polite, and they behave well and work well with each other. Pupils take up opportunities to be active when out-of-hours activities are available and they have a satisfactory understanding of how to live a healthy life style, although some do not put this into practice.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall although there are too many mathematics lessons that are inadequate. In these lessons the teachers' questions and the tasks for pupils are often too easy. Pupils have few opportunities to explain their thinking, to hypothesise or to apply their knowledge, and this hinders their progress. There is an over-reliance on worksheets which limits pupils' opportunities to extend their understanding.

Typically, lessons are well structured. Teachers give clear explanations to pupils and make good use of resources, including the interactive whiteboard and ICT. However, there is insufficient attention given to pupils' prior learning by some teachers and, as a result, some lessons are not as challenging as they should be, particular for higher attaining pupils. There is too much use of simple worksheets and this hinders pupils' progress. Satisfactory use is made of teaching assistants in lessons although, sometimes, they are not sufficiently directed and do not support pupils' learning. Teachers' marking in English is generally good although, on occasion,

suggestions and comments are imprecise and pupils are not able to use them sufficiently to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory overall and enables pupils to develop personal and social skills well. Apart from in Reception and Year 1, there are few links between subjects and few opportunities to use mathematics across the curriculum. The introduction of 'big writing' is improving children's writing skills, but the curriculum for mathematics is not broad enough as there are relatively few opportunities for pupils to apply their knowledge in purposeful tasks. A good range of visits, visiting speakers and performers enriches the curriculum. Out-of-lesson opportunities to participate in clubs take place for short periods for a narrow range of pupils at different points in the year. Justifiably parents and pupils would like to see more activities offered to a greater proportion of pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Adults are sensitive to the needs of pupils and take good steps to ensure that they are cared for and supported. Pupils have a sense of confidence in knowing that there is an adult they can talk to about any issues that they have. Older pupils are trained for their role as 'playground pals' and contribute well to this caring atmosphere. Transition procedures for pupils moving on to the next class or to the next key stage are satisfactory. Teachers and teaching assistants help pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities by organising catch-up programmes to meet their needs in literacy. The special needs coordinator ensures that, where necessary, pupils have individual education plans and these are reviewed frequently. The school's procedures for safeguarding pupils' welfare, including child protection and completing risk assessments, comply with statutory requirements.

Pupils are aware of their learning targets, particularly in English, and know what they need to do in their next lesson to improve their work. Pupils are less certain about how to improve their work in mathematics. The targets are displayed clearly in classrooms and are reviewed regularly.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher provides satisfactory leadership. He is supported well by senior and middle managers, who know the general strengths and the weaknesses of the school. The school evaluates its performance adequately but on occasion is too slow to introduce measures to tackle areas of weakness. Despite the fact that governors and senior leaders were aware of the weaknesses in mathematics and in teaching and learning, action to tackle the problems was not swift or effective enough. As a result, the school's performance in mathematics declined further. The school's plan for improvement is satisfactory but lacks precision in milestones, success criteria and the role of evaluation. Governors are well placed to challenge the school to improve and to act as critical friends. Senior leaders have acted to tackle some aspects of unsatisfactory teaching. Staff training is planned to improve the teaching of mathematics but there has not been enough time, as yet, to identify any impact. Subject leaders have a clear

overview of their subjects. Their monitoring of pupils' work, teachers' lesson plans and the quality of resources is an improvement since the last inspection.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	Yes

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Inspection of Ditton Primary School, Widnes, WA8 7HD

Thank you for your warm welcome when I visited your school to see how well you are learning. You impressed me with your confidence and your knowledge of your targets. It was a pleasure to talk to you and to hear your views about Ditton Primary. I was impressed with the foreign languages that you learn. It was good to hear children in Reception saying 'hola!' and good to see the work that you did on your Italian day. It was also good to see you using the climbing wall at playtime.

Here are some other things that are good about your school:

- You have a good knowledge about how to stay safe.
- You get on well with each other, and usually behave well.
- You have some good ideas on how to raise funds and help others.
- You achieve well in science and English.

The school is satisfactory overall but I think that it needs to improve in some important areas. You can help by telling your teachers when the work is too easy. I have asked Mr Berresford and the school to:

- raise the standards that you reach and improve the progress that you make in mathematics
- improve mathematics lessons so that you complete harder work and so that teachers challenge you more
- give you more opportunities to use the mathematical knowledge that you have in purposeful tasks.

I wish you all the best for the future.